

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



NEWS RELEASE

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Government Reform Committee Overwhelmingly Approves Historic Legislation on D.C. Voting Rights *Committee Passes Davis-Norton Bill By 29-4 Margin*

WASHINGTON D.C. – Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) is pleased to announce the historic approval by the Government Reform Committee of legislation to grant the District of Columbia a voting representative in the House of Representatives.

By a convincing 29 to 4 vote, the Committee approved H.R. 5388, “The District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act of 2006,” legislation sponsored by Davis, D.C. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, and two dozen additional Members of Congress.

“I am pleased beyond words,” Davis said. “The Committee has taken a giant leap forward today for the principle of D.C. voting rights. We still have a long road ahead of us, but today’s vote is a cause for celebration. It is also an indication that Members of both parties are coalescing around this issue – and, on this issue at least, rising above partisanship.”

Republicans on the Committee voted 14-4 in favor of the bill. All 15 Democrats present for the vote supported it.

H.R. 5388 would treat the District of Columbia like a congressional district for the purposes of allowing direct representation within the House of Representatives. The bill would also permanently increase the size of Congress by two to 437.

The next state in line for representation, based on the 2000 Census, is Utah. The addition of a seat for D.C. (the most Democratic jurisdiction in the nation) coupled with a seat for Utah (President Bush’s largest margin of victory in 2004) makes this a politically neutral solution. The bill does not affect Senate representation in any way.

Legal analyses by Ken Starr, Georgetown University professor Viet Dinh, and others have shown the legislation passes Constitutional muster, given Congress's plenary power over the District of Columbia.

Chairman Davis's full statement follows:

"Over more than two centuries, residents of the District of Columbia have fought in ten wars and paid billions of dollars in federal taxes. They have sacrificed and shed blood to help bring democratic freedoms to people in distant lands. But here, at the symbolic apex of democracy, they lack what is arguably the most fundamental right of all.

"Today, as American men and women are fighting for democracy in Baghdad, our Committee takes a momentous step toward bringing democracy to our Nation's Capital.

"H.R. 5388 is the result of years of bipartisan study, negotiation, and compromise. It is, in short, a reflection of the best of what Congress can and should be.

"This legislation comes before us today with 26 original co-sponsors – 13 Republicans and 13 Democrats. More have asked to sign on today. We've set partisanship aside to right a fundamental wrong.

"It is simply inexcusable that residents of the District of Columbia, the Capital of the Free World, the city that symbolizes our grand experiment in representative democracy – that these citizens do not have a representative with a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives, the People's House.

"Our consensus legislation corrects this injustice in a way that passes Constitutional muster.

"We give the District of Columbia a permanent, full voting member by expanding the size of the House by two seats, to 437. One seat is the District's. The other would go to the state next in line for a seat, according to the 2000 Census. That happens to be Utah -- the state that gave President Bush his highest margin of victory in 2004.

"Like a puff of smoke, the politics that have been clouding this issue for far too long disappears. The reason we've reached consensus is because this plan is partisan neutral. It takes political concerns off the table, freeing us to do the right thing.

"There is precedent for all of this. Historically, any time Congress has increased in size it has done so in a politically balanced way. In the long run, who knows what will happen demographically? Who knows what political realignments might occur?

"I know I'm going to work as hard as I can to make the District a Republican stronghold down the road.

"The new version of the bill introduced this week includes two significant changes from earlier efforts. First, we make the Utah seat at-large. This was done to ensure Mr. Matheson's district would not be re-drawn before the 2010 census. Second,

we made the increase to 437 seats permanent. This was done so that no members would be forced to choose between a district in their state and a vote for D.C. Now, if this legislation is enacted, some state is going to be very glad their members voted to give the District its vote in Congress.

“We believe this legislation is historic. It is fair. It is constitutional, and we have the opinions of Viet Dinh, Ken Starr and others to back that up. The Courts have never struck down a Congressional exercise of the District Clause, and there is no reason to think they would act differently in this case. It is now a matter of political will.

“It is not often in politics when moral clarity and political considerations can peacefully co-exist. But here they productively conjoin to serve liberty.

“We have the pledge of Chairman Sensenbrenner to take up the issue in the Judiciary Committee. I want to publicly thank him for that. I look forward to answering any questions he might have about changes we’ve made to the legislation.

“Today’s vote is a critical first step. But it’s just that – a step. From here we will rely on the bridge-builders and pragmatists who’ve helped us get this far.

“Because let’s be honest: this legislation – this *movement* – is not without its critics. I think I understand why. Inattention. Misunderstanding. A lack of political opportunity and a lack of will to compromise for the greater good.

“But I’m reminded of something Teddy Roosevelt said:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes up short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, *at least he fails while daring greatly*. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

“Today we dare greatly, and I want to thank my colleagues for their willingness to let reason prevail.”

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